



Beatification and Canonization



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By Reverend J.] R. MacMahon, S. J.

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INTRODUCTION

The bells of Saint Peter's ring out triumphantly, announcing the utterance by the Vicar of Christ of the solemn words: "We decree and define that the Blessed is a Saint." The Catholic world rejoices and reverently invokes the new saint.

Yet of the millions who rejoice, comparatively few, it may be fairly said, realize the labor that has been expended in the process which has led up to this triumphant conclusion. A process begun, perhaps, centuries before, and which has entailed not only time, but vast labor and considerable expense. A process that might never have succeeded but for a volume of prayer and mortification, elements of the greatest importance in every spiritual undertaking, whose moment cannot be estimated in terms of earthly values, or fully appreciated in this life.

Our object in writing is to enable our readers to realize, to some extent, what Canonization involves (and, as a stage in the process, Beatification). To describe the process in all its details would require a lengthy treatise; it is not being attempted here. But enough will be set forth to give an idea of the holiness that is required for Canonization, and of the rigid scrutiny which ensures, as far as human means allow, that no unworthy name is submitted to the Pope for admission to the Roll (or Canon) of the Saints--the Church's Roll of Honor. We say, "as far as human means allow," in order to distinguish the process leading up to Canonization from the solemn act itself. For, when the Pope utters the solemn words defining the new saint, he is relying, not merely on human industry or prudence or wisdom, but on the special assistance of the Holy Ghost, and his definition is infallible.

The veneration and invocation of the Saints in Heaven is a notable feature of Catholic practice. But while the private veneration and invocation of those whom one seriously believes to be in heaven is lawful, public worship may be offered to those only who have been judged by the Church to be worthy of it. And this judgment takes the form either of Beatification or of Canonization.

Beatification permits the title "Blessed" to be given to a servant of God, and certain acts of veneration to be performed in his honor, limited to definite places or groups of people, for example, religious Orders. It does not involve the exercise of the infallible teaching power of the Pope.

Canonization is a final, and, as already said, infallible, sentence by which the Pope defines the Blessed to be a Saint and orders the veneration of the Saint throughout the Universal Church.

HISTORY OF BEATIFICATION AND CANONIZATION

Beatification and Canonization, in their present form, are the result of a long and complicated development of discipline.

In the early days of the Church, martyrs were venerated publicly, in the places where they had given their lives for the Faith. But for this local public veneration to be lawful, the approval of the Bishop was required and was given only after a careful investigation of the facts. Here we have the first trace of Beatification.

Then the various local churches exchanged with each other the names of their recognized martyrs and information concerning their heroic deaths, so that in course of time the veneration of some was, with the consent of the Pope, extended to the entire Church. This final stage corresponded to what is now called Canonization.

Later on, possibly in the 4th century, public veneration was permitted to be given to confessors--those, namely, who had exercised heroic virtues, but had not been called upon to face a violent death for the Faith. In their case, also, recognition by ecclesiastical authority was necessary.

With the increase of means of communication with Rome, the centre of unity, the intervention of the Pope--a thing desirable in beatifications for the sake, at least, of greater solemnity--became more frequent; in canonizations the papal authority was not merely desirable, but essential. The first example of a formal and solemn canonization seems to be that of the year 993, when Pope John XV canonized Saint Uldaric, Bishop of Augsburg.

In 1170 Beatification was reserved to the Holy See by Pope Alexander III, who decreed that it was not lawful to venerate anyone as a saint without the authority of the Roman Church. Although he used the word "Saint," it is clear that he was referring to beatification; the words "Saint" and "Blessed" were not strictly distinguished until the middle of the 17th century, and as for the authority to canonize, it was never granted to diocesan Bishops, nor could it be, so there was no question of reserving it.

Whatever obscurity may have remained after the decree of 1170 was removed in 1634 by Pope Urban VIII, who reserved to the Holy See the decision of all questions concerning the public veneration of the Servants of God. And this has been the law ever since Pope Urban, moreover, forbade the giving of such veneration to any persons before the Holy Sec should have canonized them or declared them Blessed; he ordered that any such veneration should cease, making, however, an exception in favor of certain classes, namely, those who had been venerated either (a) with the common consent of the Church, or (b) with papal permission, or (c) in the writings of the Fathers or of the Saints, or (d) for a very long time--one hundred years prior to- 1634. These are known as "excepted cases," and the Pope did not propose to interfere with them. Only in the event of there being question of proceeding to their canonization is positive papal approval required. This positive approval or confirmation of their cult is called equipollent (that is, equivalent) beatification. An example of the confirmation by the Pope of an immemorial cult is to be found in the case of the Blessed Stilla of Abenberg, who died about the year 1140, and whose equipollent beatification was decreed in 1927.

Pope UrbanVIII also defined the procedure to be followed in investigating the worthiness of those whose beatification or canonization was sought.

We have said that the first example of a solemn and formal canonization is to be found in the year 993. Of a solemn and formal beatification in Saint Peter's the first instance is that of Saint Francis de Sales, in 1662. Since the year 1741 at least, when Benedict XIV confirmed the privilege, solemn canonizations and beatifications have been reserved to Saint Peter's, Rome--or, as it is officially styled, the Vatican Basilica. But in earlier times, there was no such limitation. Saint Thomas a Becket, for example, was canonized by Pope Alexander III in the Cathedral of Segni (Province of Rome) in the year 1172.

In the year 1587, Pope Sixtus V established the Sacred Congregation of Rites and gave it charge of causes of beatification and canonization, along with other duties. The Congregation is still in existence. Its activity may be estimated from the fact that in the course of the 25 years 1926-1950 there were 38 Canonization ceremonies (49 Canonized) and 54 ceremonies of formal Beatification (420 Beatified, including 15 who were subsequently Canonized within the period mentioned and who are, therefore, included in the number 49). In addition to these, there were a number of equivalent beatifications, which do not attract so much public notice, but which involve much inquiry and toil.

THE PROCESS OF BEATIFICATION

The procedure followed in investigating the worthiness of those whose beatification is sought has remained substantially unchanged from the time of Urban VIII (1634) down to the present day. There are three stages in the process of formal beatification:--(a) the process instituted by the local Bishop; (b) the introduction of the trial at the Sacred Congregation of Rites; (c) the Apostolic trial.

The first step is taken by the Petitioner--that is, the person or group of persons who wish to promote the cause of Beatification of the Servant of God and are prepared to undertake the enterprise and to meet the necessary expenses. Ordinarily the petitioner is represented at the ecclesiastical tribunal by an agent or procurator, who is called the Postulator, and must be a priest resident in Rome.

To obtain from the Holy See the introduction of a cause of beatification, certain facts must first be solidly proved, namely, the purity of doctrine of the Servant of God, as shown in his writings (if any); the fame of his sanctity, virtues, and miracles, or martyrdom; the absence of any decisive impediment; the absence of any public worship in his honor.

Hence the Postulator (or a vice-postulator representing him) asks the diocesan Bishop to call for all the writings of the Servant of God, and to set up an inquiry into his fame for sanctity, etc., and into the absence of any public worship. The Bishop competent to act is he in whose diocese the person died or miracles have occurred.

The Bishop, accordingly, if he approves of the request, calls upon all those who possess any writings of the Servant of God to deliver them up (or authenticated copies). When collected, these are sent to Rome for examination. The Bishop also holds an inquiry into the fame for sanctity, martyrdom, miracles. But if thirty years have passed since the death of the Servant of God, further progress is barred, unless it is proved that there has been no fraud or culpable neglect in the delay. This would be the case, for instance, if the investigation were to be deliberately postponed until the death of persons who might be able to give unfavorable evidence.

At the inquiry ten witnesses, at least, must testify to the existence of a popular belief in the sanctity of the Servant of God, a belief not artificially stimulated, continuous, growing, and actually held by the greater part of the people.

A written record is kept of the investigation; and a certified copy is sent to Rome, while the original is kept, closed and sealed, among the Bishop's records--never to be opened without leave of the Holy See. It will be noted that the Bishop--or the judges appointed by him--does not pronounce any judgment as to the fame for sanctity; he merely carries out investigation and submits the results to the Roman Congregation.

There remains the question of the absence of public worship. Four witnesses, at least, must testify to this. Also the tribunal visits the grave of the Servant of God, the room in which he lived or died, and any other places in which signs of such worship might be expected to be. Such signs would be the erection of a statue at the grave, a representation of the person with rays of light or a halo, lighted candles, etc. It is the duty of the tribunal to pronounce judgment as to whether or not public worship has been given. A full report is sent to Rome.

The first stage of the process is now complete; the Bishop has done his part, and the Congregation of Rites takes up the case.

Before proceeding further, it may be well to explain the position of an official who plays a very considerable part in the process, and is--as far as his popular nickname goes, at least--the best known, namely, the "Devil's Advocate," or, as he is properly styled, the Promotor Fidei (Promoter of the Faith). His duty is to detect any defects in the procedure, or flaws, in the proofs, to raise difficulties and doubts, to formulate questions to be put to the witnesses at the trial.

THE EXAMINATIONS

When the results of the Bishop's investigation arrive in Rome, the Sacred Congregation of Rites has the writings of the Servant of God examined by two theologians. The object of this examination is twofold : to discover, first, if the writings contain anything contrary to faith or morals, and, secondly, whether they furnish any indication of the character, the virtues or the defects of the writer. If the examination brings to light anything out of harmony with faith, or objectionable, the Pope decides whether the cause may be allowed to proceed. A favorable decision by the Pope does not involve an approval of the writings, but it declares that the doctrine they contain, erroneous though it be and even heretical, is not a bar in the particular case to the discussion of the writer's merits as to Beatification, for he may have erred innocently, or retracted his error.

The report of the Bishop's investigation into the fame of the Servant of God for holiness or martyrdom is examined: the Promoter of the Faith raises difficulties and objections against the introduction of the cause, and these must be answered by the advocate defending it. The Cardinals of the Congregation of Rites, having before them the Bishop's report, the difficulties raised by the Promoter of the Faith, and the answers of the advocate, consider whether the case is strong enough for them to recommend the Pope to sign the document giving them authority to proceed with the cause. If they come to a favorable decision, and the Pope acts on their recommendation, the cause is said to be "introduced."

Up to the year 1913, a Servant of God, whose cause had been "introduced," was given the title "Venerable." Since then this title may not be given until a further stage has been reached, namely, the publication of the decree declaring the heroicity of his virtues. The title "Servant of God" is given to those who have died with the fame of sanctity.

Many factors may delay or hasten the introduction of a cause, so the interval between the death of a Servant of God and the introduction of the cause varies considerably in practice. For instance, Blessed Claude de la Colombiere died in 1682; the decree authorizing the introduction of his cause was not signed until 1880--an interval of nearly 200 years. He was beatified in 1929. As an instance of progress rare in its rapidity there is the case of Saint Teresa of Lisieux. She died in 1897; her cause was introduced in 1914; she was beatified in 1923 and canonized in 1925.

After the introduction of the cause, the Cardinals review the sentence already passed by the local Bishop as to the absence of public worship. If they disagree, with that sentence, and judge that public worship is being paid, the process can advance no further until every trace of it has been removed, and a space of time has elapsed.

When the Congregation has published its decision that the law prohibiting public worship has been adequately observed, it next appoints judges, five in number, to make an investigation, with authority from the Holy See. This is the beginning of the "Apostolic Process." The purpose of this investigation is to verify the general reputation of sanctity or martyrdom, and also to collect evidence concerning the sanctity itself, the virtues, the miracles, or the martyrdom. This process is carried out in the place where the witnesses live. It must be begun within three months and completed within two years.

In the course of the investigation of the virtues in detail, the judges visit the tomb of the Servant of God, which is opened for the purpose of examining the remains, and reporting on their condition. They are assisted by medical experts, who provide a written report, on oath, as to the state of the remains. If the body is still incorrupt, or exhales a sweet perfume, these experts say whether in their opinion the intact state of the body, or the perfume, can be naturally explained or not, giving their reasons.

THE VIRTUES OF THE SERVANT OF GOD

When the five judges appointed by the Holy See complete the first part of the Apostolic Process, they send a full report of their investigation to Rome. The advocate of the cause must then satisfy five Cardinals of the Congregation of Rites that the rules regulating the enquiry have been duly observed.

The next step in the process--the discussion by the Congregation of the virtues of the Servant of God--may not be taken until fifty years have elapsed since his death. (Exceptions to this rule are sometimes made. For instance, the discussion of the virtues of Saint Teresa of Lisieux was begun in 1920--only twenty-three years after her death). This discussion occupies three meetings of the Congregation--the ante-preparatory, the preparatory, and the general--which are held for the purpose of reviewing all the evidence that has been collected, the arguments of the advocate of the cause, the objections and difficulties raised by the Promoter of the Faith, and the replies to them, in order to answer the solemn and vital question: "Is there clear proof in this case of the theological virtues of Faith, Hope, and Charity towards God and the neighbor, and of the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Justice, Temperance and Fortitude, and of those connected with them, in the heroic degree?"

At the final-meeting--the general--the Holy Father presides and the decisive answer to the question rests with him. If his decision is favorable, a decree is published, declaring that the Servant of God exercised the virtues in a heroic degree. After the publication of this decree, the title of "Venerable" may be given to the Servant of God, but this does not mean that public worship is permitted.

The eminent virtue required as a distinguishing mark of sanctity is technically known as heroic. Virtue may be described as "a habit of right conduct;" Christian virtue, to merit the qualification "heroic," must be such as to "enable its owner to perform virtuous actions with uncommon promptitude, ease, and pleasure, from supernatural motives and without human reasoning, with self-abnegation and full control over his natural inclinations." Or, as it has been described, it is a habit of performing those good acts which exceed the mode of working followed by estimable men who live in grace and act worthily. Heroicity consists in the excellence of the work, arising from its difficult nature and from the circumstances in which it is done. This heroicity must appear as a constant feature in the life of the Servant of God; a few heroic actions--apart from martyrdom--do not suffice to establish the manifold excellence of life which constitutes sanctity. On the other hand, numerous heroic acts of each and every virtue are not required. There must be many heroic acts of Faith, Hope, and especially Charity, but heroic acts of the other virtues are required only in so far as the Servant of God had opportunities, according to his state and condition, of exercising them. While there is no rigid rule as to the length of time during which the Servant of God must have persevered in the practice of eminent virtue, the period must be sufficient to justify the practice being described as permanent and habitual.

It may be asked, "How far do imperfections and venial sins conflict with heroic virtue? If the venial sins are many and quite deliberate, they indicate a state of soul that cannot be reconciled with the fervor of charity proper to heroic virtue. But if they are not fully deliberate and arise from frailty rather than malice, if they are followed by prompt and true sorrow, and due care is taken to correct them, they do not exclude the possibility of the existence of heroic virtue. No doubt, the Promoter of the Faith ("the devil's advocate") will draw attention to them, and they may render more difficult the proof of heroic virtue, but they do not operate as an absolute bar to the success of the cause.

HEROIC VIRTUE

In its examination of the evidence collected regarding the exercise of heroic virtue, the Congregation of Rites is by no means satisfied with general affirmations--it insists on definite and detailed testimony. In particular, inquiry is made into the practice of prayer, both vocal and mental--as being the first means of attaining to sanctity and a sign of true virtue.

Regarding the exercise of the virtue of Faith, its ordinary extent is measured by the external profession of the truths to which one internally adheres, by the observance of the commandments, by the practice of prayer, by submission and obedience to God, to the Catholic Church and its visible head on earth--the Pope--in believing and doing all things required for eternal salvation, by the propagation of the Faith, by the fear and adoration of God and the worship paid to His saints, by the horror of sin, the doing of penance, by patience in trials, by joy in doing good works, by humility and self-effacement. The heroic degree of Faith--as of the other virtues is measured by the multitude of acts, the facility, promptness and delight with which they are performed, and the overcoming of obstacles, so as to surpass the ordinary way of acting of upright men.

The inquiry into the virtue of Hope is not confined to asking whether the Servant of God hoped firmly for eternal salvation; it includes questions as to the confidence with which he practiced good works, his resignation in adversity, his patience under persecution, his joy at the near approach of death.

Regarding the virtue of Charity, it is asked whether the Servant of God constantly thought of Him, and often spoke of Him; whether he continually meditated on the Divine goodness, on the mysteries of religion, and in particular on the Passion of Our Lord; whether he strove to avoid not only sins, but imperfections; whether he showed zeal for God's honor, rejoiced to hear Him spoken of, and welcomed suffering for the sake of God? It is asked also whether he showed charity to his neighbor by giving material aid and personal service, by forgiving injuries, and by a sincere and practical desire for the salvation of souls.

The cardinal virtues (Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude) and those connected with them--especially humility--are similarly examined. The sufferings of the Servant of God are particularly inquired into, and the spirit with which he endured them. Likewise the manner in which he performed the duties proper to his state of life.

Finally, the circumstances of the death are specially considered, and the dispositions shown at that solemn hour.

An element often conspicuous in the lives of the Saints, namely, extraordinary graces (such as ecstasies, visions, and revelations) is far from overlooked at the inquiry. The evidence concerning such phenomena is most critically examined; for the possibility of hallucination and of diabolical deception is a very real one in this matter. The absence of natural and diabolical agency must be clearly established before these phenomena are admitted as supernatural. And while it is true that the Church has constantly regarded true ecstasy as something sacred and worthy of all respect, she does not admit it and similar favors, by themselves, as proofs of sanctity, nor does she require them as indispensable. It is rather the sanctity, already proved by the exercise of heroic virtue, that verifies the divine character of these manifestations. When sanctity has been demonstrated, they may be accepted as confirmatory indications of God's friendship.

Infused contemplation, a favor commonly granted to the Saints, is not required as an essential in the process. Pope Benedict XIV states, "... many perfect men are canonized by the Church without the least mention having been made in their process of infused contemplation. It is sufficient to have proved the heroism of their virtues and miracles obtained through their intercession."

MIRACLES

While it is true that final perseverance--death in the state of grace--is all that is necessary to gain the "Crown of Life" in the Church triumphant in Heaven, nevertheless for the authorization, in the Church militant on earth, of public veneration of the dead, their exercise of heroic virtue must be proved, and that proof must be confirmed by miracles, worked through their intercession, after death.

The primary and general purpose of miracles is the glory of God; they may also serve to prove the truth of a doctrine or the holiness of an individual. Their efficacy as proofs is derived from the fact that true miracles are effects that cannot have been produced by any natural agency, which are beyond the order of the whole of created nature, and therefore involve a special intervention of Divine Power. This special intervention is never exercised when its effect would be to lead men into inevitable error, for that would be contrary to God's goodness: a true miracle, therefore, worked under such conditions as to demonstrate the sanctity of a person, is a divine testimony.

For Beatification, the number of miracles required by the Church depends upon the quality of the evidence at the Informatory and Apostolic processes. If the witnesses as to virtues at each process were eyewitnesses, two miracles suffice; if there were eyewitnesses at the Informatory process only, three miracles are required; if there was no evidence from eyewitnesses, four miracles are usually necessary.

The Congregation of Rites does not proceed to the discussion of miracles until after the decree of approval of the virtues. For miracles (and the same is true of other extraordinary favors, visions, etc.) do not constitute sanctity, and are ignored if heroic virtue has not been solidly proved. They avail as proofs of sanctity when worked through the intercession of the Servant of God, after his death. The fact that such intercession has been made is chiefly established from the fact that he has been invoked by the faithful.

The first step in the discussion of the miracles is an examination of the evidence by two experts appointed by the Congregation. If these two agree in rejecting a miracle, it is dropped. As miracles most often take the form of a cure of some disease, the experts in such cases must be eminent in either medicine or surgery, and, if possible, specialists. Their report, with reasons for their conclusions, concerns two questions : 1. If there is question of a cure, is the person truly cured? 2. Can the fact be explained by natural means?

If the report is satisfactory, three meetings of the Congregation are held, similar to those at which the heroicity of the virtues was discussed, the question now being: Is there clear proof in this case of miracles? And what are they? The final decision rests with the Pope, and if it is favorable, a decree is issued to that effect.

The obtaining of a favorable decision is far from easy; and those non-Catholics who scoff at the credulity of the Church in accepting certain effects as miracles would be surprised if they realized the extensive evidence that is insisted upon and the rigid and scientific criticism to which it is submitted before being admitted as conclusive.

Before a cure is accepted as miraculous, proof is required (1) that the malady was a serious one; (2) that the cure was not due to natural remedies--if such were used; (3) that it was instantaneous or at least sudden; (4) that it was permanent.

The word instantaneous is to be taken, not as invariably meaning something done in a moment of time, but as indicating an effect produced with a rapidity clearly beyond the forces of nature.

While functional diseases can be miraculously cured, the Congregation of Rites, in view of the obscurity of the cause of such cures and the consequent difficulty of proving its miraculous character, does not accept such cures and insists on the organic nature of the disease being established before admitting a cure as miraculous.

MARTYRS

The word "martyr," originally meaning a witness, was applied in the earliest days of the Church to those who gave testimony regarding the life, the sufferings and the resurrection of Our Lord. At an early stage in the life of the Church the title "martyr" came to be applied exclusively to those who had died for the Faith. Nowadays, unfortunately, it is often used, or rather abused, in a way that weakens and degrades it. The strict meaning of martyrdom, according to the technical usage of centuries, is: "The undergoing of death, or sufferings naturally causing death, inflicted out of hatred for the faith, or on account of the exercise of Christian virtue, and endured willingly."

Martyrdom is regarded by the Church as an excellent proof of sanctity--so excellent that the detailed examination of the exercise of heroic virtues is not required, nor are miracles as strictly insisted upon as in the case of non-martyrs; the question upon which the process depends is: "Is there clear proof of martyrdom and of its cause and of signs and miracles in the present case and for the present purpose?"

In the discussion of martyrdom, the reason of the persecution is a most important element, for, as St. Augustine put it, it is not the death, but the cause, that makes true martyrs. "The cause must be (1) on the part of the victim, either the profession of the Faith of Christ, or the doing of some good action or the avoiding of some sin, for His sake; (2) on the part of the persecutor, hatred for the Faith, or of some good work prescribed by the Faith. Saint Joan of Arc, accordingly, ranks, not among the Martyrs, but among the Virgins. Sometimes a tyrant alleges political reasons for inflicting death; but the Church seeks the real reason, which may well be hatred for the Faith, more or less concealed under a political mask. The martyrs under Nero were accused of setting Rome on fire, but the real reason for their deaths was their Faith. And history has repeated itself since then--nearer home. Pope Benedict XIV quotes as an example Mary, Queen of Scots, whom he regarded as having truly died for the Faith, and recognition of whom as a martyr he considered quite within the bounds of possibility. It is sometimes difficult to disentangle the motives--political and religious--for which death has been inflicted on various victims; and the Church takes the greatest care to make sure that death for merely political activities is not mistaken for death for the Faith. Lack of evidence as to this is probably the reason for the slow progress in many cases.

The law requiring miracles applies to martyrs, just as it applies to others, but it is not so rigidly insisted upon, for, in the case of evident martyrdom, the Congregation of Rites, according to the present discipline, has authority to dispense with proof of miracles and to accept signs in their place, or, in the absence of even signs, it may petition the Pope to permit the process to advance without them. By signs are meant sensible effects, not outside the order of nature, which, either in themselves or in their circumstances, serve, by a special providence, to demonstrate the sanctity of a Servant of God; for example, immunity from the attacks of ferocious beasts, radiance surrounding the body, a crown, of light over the head. Signs need not depend upon the intercession of the martyr, need not be worked after death, and may be proved by documentary evidence.

Three meetings of the Congregation of Rites are held for the purpose of discussing the question whether martyrdom, its cause, etc., have been satisfactorily proved. The Holy Father presides over the third meeting, and the final decision rests with him. If he is satisfied with the proofs, he orders the publication of a decree to that effect. Thereafter the martyr may be styled "Venerable," but may not yet be given public worship.

The next--and final--stage leading up to Beatification, whether of a martyr or not, is the discussion of the question whether steps may safely be taken to proceed to Beatification.

BEATIFICATION

An tuto procedi possit?" Is it SAFE to proceed to the Beatification of the Servant of God? The discussion and decision of this question constitutes the second-last step of the long and difficult process. Virtues and miracles have been proved. The Pope now hears the opinions of the Cardinals and the Consultors of the Congregation of Rites as to the safety of proceeding to the final step, but defers his decision. If he decides favorably, a decree to that effect is published. It is read in the presence of the Pope, the officials of the Congregation and a large assembly. An address of devotion and gratitude is then read to the Holy Father, who makes an appropriate reply. .

It was the privilege of the writer to be among those present on a memorable occasion of this kind--the reading of the Decree de Tuto in the Cause of B. Claude de la Colombiere, on the 7th of June, 1929, the morning on which the Lateran Treaty and Concordat had just been ratified. The applause which greeted the Holy Father on his entry into the Hall was fervidly enthusiastic.

The Vatican Basilica (Saint Peter's, Rome) is the scene of the final step--the actual Beatification. The whole apse is richly adorned with hangings and myriads of clusters of electric lights. Over the altar, above the Chair of Saint Peter, is hung a large painting of the glorification of the new Blessed. It is covered with a veil. On the altar some of his relics are also covered. From the pillars are suspended pictures representing the miracles accepted for the Beatification. In the portico other pictures portray appropriate scenes from his life. Saint Peter's statue is clothed in pontifical robes.

The Pope does not personally take part in the ceremony. At ten o'clock on the morning of the day appointed the Cardinals of the Congregation of Rites take their places before the altar of the Chair, on the Gospel side. On the Epistle side are the Cardinal Archpriest of the Basilica and the Chapter. The ceremony opens with a petition from the Postulator of the Cause to the Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation to order the publication of the Apostolic Brief of Beatification; the request is granted and the Postulator asks the Cardinal Archpriest of Saint Peter's for permission to publish the Brief in the Basilica. This obtained, the Brief is read aloud. It usually contains a eulogy of the new Blessed and a short review of his life. It terminates with the solemn authorization of the application to him of the title Beatus (Blessed), and of the public veneration of his relics; permission to add to his images rays of light; the approval of an Office to be said yearly on his feast-day, and a Mass likewise in his honor. The Office and the Mass are approved only for the places and persons specially connected with him.

As soon as the Brief has been read, the bells of the Basilica peal forth the glad news, the veils covering the large picture and the relics are removed, and the vast assembly stands for the singing of the Te Deum. The new Blessed is invoked and his prayer is said. The picture and the relics are, incensed and the solemn Mass is said.

Thousands of pictures and booklets are distributed among those present. The ceremony lasts over two hours.

In the afternoon the Pope enters Saint Peter's. He is greeted on his entry by the music of the silver trumpets, and is borne on the sedia gestatoria in solemn procession up the nave. On his arrival at the altar, the Most Blessed Sacrament is exposed and the prayer of the Beatus is said. Benediction of the Most Blessed Sacrament is then given. The Postulator of the Cause presents the Pope with a relic of the new Beatus in a precious reliquary, a picture on silk with fringes of gold, a richly bound copy of the life, and a traditional bouquet of artificial flowers.

This afternoon ceremony is short--lasting about half an hour.

A solemn triduum is afterwards celebrated in Rome, in the national church of the Blessed or in the church of his Order if he was a religious; on each of the three days a Pontifical Mass is sung and a panegyric preached.

CANONIZATION

As a rule, the Pope does not proceed to the canonization of a Blessed until two miracles are proved to have been worked through his intercession after his formal beatification. In cases in which longstanding cult has been positively approved by the Pope (equipollent beatification), three miracles are required. The proof and discussion of the miracles follow the same course as in the case of beatification. But miracles are not always insisted upon. Finally, the Pope decrees that it is safe to proceed to the solemn canonization.

The vast Basilica is magnificently decorated in a manner similar to that described in the section on Beatification, but on a grander scale. At about 8 o'clock in the morning on the day appointed, the Pope enters Saint Peter's, borne on the sedia gestatoria, and preceded by a procession which to the on-lookers seems endless. When all have taken their places, the Cardinal-Procurator of the Canonization and a consistorial advocate advance to the Papal throne, and the advocate addresses the Holy Father : "Most Holy Father, the most reverend Cardinal (naming him) here present, earnestly begs that the venerable Beatus (naming him) be placed by Your Holiness on the roll of the Saints of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and be pronounced a Saint by all the faithful." A prelate re-plies for the Pope that the Holy Father, before making a pronouncement on so important a matter, exhorts those present to ask for light from on high. The Litany of the Saints is sung, and the advocate repeats his petition, changing the word "earnestly" into "more earnestly." An answer similar to the first is given, and the Pope kneels in prayer while the Miserere is chanted. The Pope then intones the Veni Creator Spiritus, at the end of which he recites the prayer to the Holy Ghost. The advocate once more repeats his petition, saying this time "most earnestly." The prelate replies that the Holy Father, convinced that the canonization is a thing agreeable to God, has decided to pronounce the final sentence. The assembly stands. and the Pope, seated on his throne, as Teacher and Head of the Universal Church, utters the solemn words.: "For the honor of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, for the exaltation of the Catholic Faith, and the increase of the Christian Religion, by the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and of Ourselves, after mature deliberation and having frequently implored the divine assistance, and by the advice of Our Venerable Brethren, the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, and of the Patriarchs, Archbishops and Bishops in this City, We decree and define the Blessed ... to be a Saint, and We inscribe him on the roll of the Saints, and ordain that his memory be celebrated by the Universal Church, as among the Saints, each year on his feast-day, with pious devotion. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost Amen."

The Pope then intones the Te Deum, the trumpets in the dome resound, and the bells of the Basilica and of all the churches in Rome ring out the glad news of the Canonization. At the conclusion of the Te Deum, the intercession of the new Saint is solemnly invoked, and the canonization ceremony terminates with the Papal Blessing.

Solemn Papal Mass immediately follows. At the Offertory of this Mass a special ceremony takes place, consisting in the offering to the Pope of candles, bread, wine, water, two turtle doves, two pigeons, and several small birds. The offering is repeated for each Saint--or group of Saints--if several have been canonized on the same day. The candles, five in number, are beautifully painted.

In this offering we find a survival of a custom reaching back to the earliest days of the Church. It was then usual to present, not only the bread and wine required for the Sacrifice, but also other objects of value, to contribute towards the support of the ministers.

The objects offered at the Solemn Papal Mass following a Canonization have each a special meaning. The wax candles are explained by spiritual writers as typifying the head and members of the Church; the head, because (1) the flame of the candle represents the Divinity of Our Lord, Who is a consuming fire, and (2) the wax, produced in its purity by the bees, and being one of the most

delicate of substances, represents the Body of Christ, and (3) the wick, concealed within the wax, represents the spotless Soul of Christ within His Sacred Body : and the members, because the canonized Saints, by their imitation of the virtues of Christ, have been, in the words of the Gospel, a burning and a shining light.

The bread indicates that the saints have loved Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, their true nourishment, the "living Bread that came down from heaven." Some writers look upon the bread as representing the word of God, for the saints nourished their souls with Catholic doctrine.

The wine is a symbol of sanctifying grace, which communicates to the branches the life of Him who said: "I am the true vine."

The tribulations of this world are indicated by the water; for the saints can adopt the words of Scripture, "Great waters cannot extinguish charity in me."

In the pigeons and turtle doves we find symbols of fidelity and the love of solitude. The dove, moreover, the messenger of peace, reminds us that the saints have completed their struggle with the world and are now reigning with God in the possession of eternal bliss and peace.

The small birds, inhabitants of the air, remind us that the saints, rising above the attractions of the things of earth, sought the Kingdom of Heaven and found their gratification in spiritual things.

Until recently the canonization ceremony, with the Solemn Papal Mass, might occupy up to five hours, ending at about one o'clock in the afternoon. It has now been somewhat simplified, and so shortened, but it must still impose a very heavy strain on the venerable Vicar of Christ: It has been described as "the most solemn and imposing ceremony in the whole liturgy of the Church."

From the brief account which we have given of the activities of the Congregation of Rites concerning processes of Beatification and Canonization (and these form part only of the duties of the Congregation) it will be clear that the processes involve a great amount of detailed investigation, toilsome study, and critical discussion. If these processes seem to advance slowly, one reason may be found in their great number, of which an idea may be formed from the fact that the Sacred Congregation had in hand 362 causes in 1915, 551 in 1931, and over 600 in 1938. (These 600 included over 50 from the Society of Jesus).

While praying for the promotion of God's glory by the official recognition of the heroic virtue of His saints of every clime, pray especially that success may crown the toils of those who promote causes appealing particularly to Irish hearts; among them--and they are many--the causes of Father John Sullivan, S. J., and Matt Talbot. And, as a closing word, we would urge our readers to add their fervent prayers--if they have not yet done so--to the nationwide chorus of supplication that we may soon be able to hail as a canonized Saint the heroic Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of All Ireland, Blessed (*subsequently Saint*) Oliver Plunket, Martyr.

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